

Opening Statement of Chairman Mollohan on NASA

Good morning, Acting Administrator Christopher Scolese and welcome before the Subcommittee. This morning we turn our attention to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. We appreciate your coming today to inform the Committee about ongoing programs and activities and general details of the NASA budget while we await the appointment and confirmation of a permanent administrator for NASA and its detailed budget submission for fiscal year 2010. Mr. Scolese was cited by Administrator Griffin as the second of twelve people that are most essential to remain at NASA, so while we do not have an Administrator in place, NASA remains in competent hands. We look forward to hearing from you this morning.

Preceding your appearance today, the Committee received testimony from a number of expert witnesses in the areas of science and technology, research and higher education, earth observation and climate change. NASA is not at the periphery of these activities; rather, it is at the center. Dr. Lennard Fisk commented that he "can find no logic in the judgment that NASA science is less important than other scientific disciplines" at NSF and NIH, for example, and that we need to recognize that space has become part of the underlying infrastructure of our society and an integral part of our foreign policy. Dr. Ralph Cicerone stated that NASA's science activities were an omission from the Gathering Storm and that its activities should be treated similarly to NIST and NSF in the doubling agenda outlined in the America COMPETES Act. He went further to note that NASA's research and higher education infrastructure is extremely important to this Nation. Innovative technologies — developed from NASA's space and aeronautics missions — have improved our health and medicine, transportation systems, public safety, computer technology, and industrial productivity.

With respect to Earth observations and climate change, NASA is also front and center. It developed the current class of Earth observation systems, nearly all of which have exceeded their life expectancies. And today, it is developing the next generation of satellites and sensors recommended by the National Research Council. Part of that effort includes the NPOESS program, which is managed by NOAA, DoD and NASA. We have had to confront major cost over-runs in the NPOESS program, and additional requirements appear likely given the anticipated need to support operational climate predictions and monitoring. In nominal terms, investments in Earth science have decreased by one-third since their high-water mark. It is time again to renew our focus on Mission to Planet Earth.

Investments in these satellite development programs and in NASA's science enterprise, generally, are critical, but they also must compete for resources with NASA's other major programs. NASA continues to fly the Shuttle, operate and maintain the International Space Station, and proceed with the Constellation program. Costs for all these activities are rising. Last year, for example, nearly 70 percent of NASA's major projects were in breach of the project's development cost and/or schedule thresholds. The price tag for Orion and Ares continues to mount, and there are considerable unknowns as to whether NASA's plans for the Ares and Orion vehicles can be executed within schedule and current cost estimates. These cost increases occur within finite annual budgets, and as such, cost increases in one program likely mean reductions in another. Given these fiscal realities, it is incumbent upon NASA to have far more reliable cost estimates at the time missions are proposed; effective management tools and empowered managers in place to minimize cost increases and schedule slippages; and greater transparency in NASA's budgeting and execution to improve program costs, budgeting, review and oversight. This is an ongoing process and one that continues today.

But the larger, looming question remains: can NASA do all that it is asked to do within its budget allocation? Although this Administration has requested nearly \$1 billion more for NASA over the fiscal year 2009 enacted level, the out-year profile for NASA is straight-lined over the next five years, signaling little change in the budget profile from the last Administration. Unlike previous years, today NASA is asked to reinvest in observations of Planet Earth and to reinvigorate its aeronautics research. These programs suffered at the expense of the Constellation program, so this is a welcomed change. NASA is to continue with its development of the existing "vision" and the new

generation of US human space flight capabilities – the cost of which, as I commented earlier, continues to mount and the timeline for initial operating capability gets pushed further and further into the future. The Shuttle is to be terminated in 2010, creating a gap in US human space flight of at least five years before Orion and Ares are available. The Space Station continues to fly, used as a platform for far less research than supported by its original justification, until 2015 at which time its fate is uncertain. If the decision is to cease the use of the Station at that time, we could be developing portions of the Constellation program for a one-way trip to low Earth orbit to take the Station from orbit. Is it any wonder that it has been so difficult to find an Administrator for this agency? At some point, it seems clear that the walk must match the talk, and that funds must follow policy. But the problem is not mid-level career staff at the Office of Management and Budget: the President, the Administrator and the Congress are responsible for defining NASA's missions and then ensuring that funds are there to support those missions. However difficult it is, the appropriate choice is one of two things – to put more money on the selected missions, or to select and fund fewer missions within a constrained budget. We can't have our cake and eat it too with NASA. Let me be clear – I'm all for putting more money on missions. I would hope that the new Administration and the new Administrator share my view.

As we all know, we have not yet received the President's complete budget submission. Accordingly, we don't know many of the details of the request. We will be anxious to see those details when the budget is submitted, and we are sure to have additional questions at that time. The hearing transcript will remain open for two weeks after the budget's submission so as to provide Members an opportunity to submit any budget-related questions.

At this time, I would like to invite you Mr. Scolese to offer your opening statement, but I would first like to recognize the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Frank Wolf, for any opening statement that he would like to make this morning.